In the Place of French

Essays in and around French studies

IN THE PLACE OF FRENCH

In Honour of Michael Spencer

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ESSAYS ON AND AROUND FRENCH STUDIES

in honour of
MICHAEL SPENCER

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

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in memoriam Michael Spencer

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Old (French) Wine, New Bottles?

This paper consists of a set of reflections on the place of Medieval Studies within contemporary University French departments; those reflections bear on the notion of the "medieval" generally and more specifically on aspects of my own experience as a medievalist and teacher here at the University of Queensland since 1971. That both the "medieval" and the "medievalist" have occupied and continue to occupy an ambiguous and somewhat uncomfortable place in many Universities, I take as a given. I have met no medieval colleague who does not have some hurtful or humorous anecdote relative to a sense of dislocation within the academic community.

In many Australian University French departments, courses relative to the language and literature of the medieval period have simply disappeared from the curriculum; others have maintained parts of courses devoted to the "early classics" (read *La Chanson de Roland*) of French Civilisation, read in the form of extracted Modern French translations.[1] In whatever form, such studies have usually been reserved exclusively, and with some form of compulsion, for Honours students. One of my strategies here has been to open up such medieval courses as options available to all students; the underlying idea is that the texts of the medieval period should be neither ignored nor privileged. The strategy has proved effective; some measure of its success is the small but steady stream of post-graduate research projects and theses since the mid 1970s. Clearly the success of such a strategy depends on some introductory course in reading texts of the earlier era, since there is no denying an initial language barrier which needs to be overcome. But I shall return to that point later. I wish to reflect first on the nature of the resistance to Old French and Philology[2] leading to their disappearance from the curricula in some Universities.

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[1] This option is quite popular as well in the American College and University system.

[2] When I do use this term in this paper, I use it in the quite narrow sense of "the academic discipline of studying or 'scientifically' elucidating the basic, literal meaning of verbal documents." I take this definition from p. 11 of the article by Siegfried Wenzel, "Reflections on (New) Philology," in *Speculum* 65 (1990) : 11-8. For many of us, at least in Australian undergraduate circles of the 1950s and 1960s, the term became synonymous with the disciplines of Historical Phonetics and Historical Grammar. This

The teaching and learning of Old French has suffered in one way or another over the last 30 or 40 years in language departments from being seen almost exclusively as an adjunct to University courses in Modern French. Behind this location of the "medieval" as an adjunct to something else and behind the justifications which have accompanied the arguments either for retention or for rejection of medieval courses lies a set of historical assumptions, assumptions stemming from nineteenth-century notions of historical evolution and evolutionary progress. The language and literature of the medieval period have been regarded as the "primitive beginnings" of something which flowered and achieved its full meaning only by the seventeenth century or later. This view was not simply a prejudice of "modernists" but was conveyed by text-books and histories of French language and literature relative to the medieval period.[3] Some of the exciting nineteenth-century insights and explorations into comparative Romance Philology, Vulgar Latin and French Philology became pedantised in curricula developed within this set of historical assumptions. Exciting imaginative medieval texts were extracted and anthologised in a form which subordinated any idea of appreciating their independent creative impetus to the need to define and relegate their interest to that of "historical beginnings." As long as this historical vision persisted, a place for the "medieval" could be justified and demanded within the curriculum. Studies into origins and primitive beginnings were intellectually fashionable in many disciplines. But when synchronic rather than diachronic approaches for Modern French language programmes were being argued for and when for some there seemed even to be some radical contradiction between the two approaches, what was to be the fate of medieval language and literature options now so firmly defined and justified in terms of their status as "historical beginnings"?

So with the adoption, over these same last 30 or so years, of methodologies of teaching Modern French language by direct methods and for increasingly communicative purposes, which itself marked a shift away from subordinating the knowledge of a language to a primarily

narrower meaning is one particularly strong in English-speaking usage. In other European traditions, the wider meaning of "espèce de littérature universelle, science composée de grammaire, de rhétorique, de poétique, d'antiquités, d'histoire et généralement de la critique et interprétation de tous les auteurs," a meaning attested in French at least since the seventeenth century (see, von Wartburg, *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Basel : R. G. Zbinden & Co., 1946 - , vol. 8, 380-1), is covered rather in English by the term of Literary Criticism. For a useful survey of the history and uses of the term, see the essay by Paul Zumthor, "Philologie," in *Encyclopædia Universalis,* 30 vols (Paris : Encyclopædia Universalis, 1990) Corpus vol. 18, 65-7.

[3] Some relevant examples of this may be found in the article by R. Howard Bloch, "New Philology and Old French," in *Speculum* 65 (1990) : 38-58, esp. 42-5.

historical and narrowly humanistic view of literary culture, the older justifications for the teaching of Philology and medieval French literature disappeared. For a time the place of Old French in the curriculum was defended by compulsion. The conflict between what became in some cases a defensive pedantic philological and grammatical approach and the initial excitement of direct communicative modes of learning Modern French put paid to Old French for many learners whose interest might otherwise have been fostered in texts which have their own inherent interest and importance alongside others of different times and places. Thus the historical evolutionary view involving clear periodisations of linguistic and cultural development tended to underestimate the independent value of the medieval period; and once that historical view started to shift, then the justification for the retention of medieval French seemed to disappear.

Consequently, for many medievalists in contemporary Australian Universities, their work has been carried on in spite of rather than because of support from their peers and colleagues. At the very first Departmental meeting I attended at the University of Queensland in 1971, a full-scale attack was mounted on the very concept of retaining anything medieval in a "modern" Department of French; the attack was led by some who would have regarded themselves as the "young Turks." I have no doubt that they were arguing from some of their own bad experiences of ploughing through pedantic philological exercises in special Honours classes imposed on them ritually by conservatives of the Old School who believed that anyone declaring themselves possessors of a respectable Honours Degree in French must be familiar with the intricacies of nineteenth-century theories of sound changes from Latin to Modern French. At that time I was perfectly happy to use whatever conservative forces were available and successfully fought off the attack.

My own experience as a medievalist had been quite different; firstly, my introduction to the different mental universe underpinning spiritual, intellectual, social and personal life in Europe from the period of Augustine and Boethius through to the Reformation had been via courses in both Middle English Literature (primarily religious and moral texts) and Scholastic Philosophy, in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result of some years in a theological college, I had some cognisance of the theological issues and debates of the period in question and some experience of the ritual organisation of life determined according to ecclesiastical times and seasons, an organisation which itself is dependent on ancient traditions of understanding the planetary movements. By the time of my arrival in Brisbane as the new medievalist in 1971, this experience had been supplemented, firstly by an intense personal interest in the art and archi-

tecture of the medieval period in Europe; then by post-graduate courses with one of the real "masters" of medieval French language and literature, Jean Rychner, a man with independent views on teaching who, in "hands on" seminars at the University of Neuchâtel, introduced those he taught to precise and stimulating methods of analysis and interpretation of medieval texts; and finally by time spent working in one of the interdisciplinary medieval institutes of Canada, the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto.[4] My own interest in maintaining the position of Medieval Studies was based on reasons quite other than the defense of philological studies in Old French as the obligatory prerequisite of any respectable French Honours graduate! Old and Middle French textual establishment and analysis were and still are the main site of my digging, but the dig was never and will never simply be located in any one narrow domain, primarily because it was my training and experience in the surrounding territory that led me to that site in the first place.

Within five years of my arrival at the University of Queensland, the courses on the History of the Language and Medieval French Literature had been opened up administratively in such a way as to make them accessible to any undergraduate student who wished to investigate such matters. Apart from a minimal language barrier, I had never understood why writings from a period prior to Villon or Rabelais should be "off limits" to all but a select few, who were then taught to despise them because, i) the course was imposed on them and ii) it was taught in a nit-picking and pedantically "philological" fashion via a series of anthologised (and sanitised) extracts, isolated from any social or artistic history or theory of the period; the power of the "word" of any of these writings, when they were taught in this way, to enter and move within the psyche of a reader was seriously obstructed. No wonder that Gide, Sartre or Camus appeared more attractive than excerpts from selected medieval texts! A fair introduction to some of the most subtle and powerfully moving texts of all time, fundamental ultimately to any historian or interpreter of European imagination in the last two thousand years, was being denied.

As I reflect on the experience of teaching medieval French over the last twenty years, I think of two incidents relative to Michael Spencer to whom this volume is dedicated. The two incidents I refer to, the first in 1973 and the second in 1988, point to a clear shift of attitudes, both in Michael but also I believe more generally within the Department, from one of resistance to Medieval French in the curriculum to one of support,

[4] I have subsequently had the good fortune of working for brief periods in two other important medieval and interdisciplinary centres, the Centre d'Études Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale, Poitiers, and the Institut d'Études Médiévales, Montréal.

encouragement and open defence. The first anecdote dates from 1973 and refers to a private social conversation between Michael and myself prior even to his appointment to the Chair of French. In that conversation he adumbrated his hope of removing components of "Philology" and Old French from the curriculum as being marginal or not relevant to his conception of a "modern" French department. But important changes were already being made in the teaching and presentation of medieval material to students in 1974 when Michael arrived. Apart from opening up the medieval courses to a wider range of students, I was already moving away from a practice in which the demands of historical phonetics and historical grammar were the focus of attention to one in which whole texts, studied as coherent documents of a particular moment in time and place, were being selected as a site for the productive exploration of ideas and values so different from our own in twentieth-century Australia. The second anecdote dates from some 15 years later, in 1988, when I applied for a secondment to the Tertiary Education Institute to develop a new course relative to the teaching of Old French. The project won support; the Humanities academic administrator, in whose province the final approval rested, expressed his acceptance of the project with a certain hesitation and reluctance; the grounds of his concern were that, in the current economic climate, such "marginal"[5] areas of teaching seemed hardly worthy of support. Michael, partly for political reasons as Head of Department at the time, but largely from a genuine sense of conviction, sprang to the defence of the project in a quite strongly worded response.

The prejudices against the medieval period and the study of it are deeply ingrained in many of even the best academic minds. I have learnt over the years to expect the greatest opposition, sometimes simply in the form of scarcely veiled derision and scorn, from Humanities colleagues who are specialists in the Literature, History or Philosophy of nineteenth and early twentieth-century century Europe. This opposition is not unique to the University of Queensland; it is certainly evident throughout the English-speaking Universities of the British Commonwealth and the United States and there is evidence of it in Europe. Here is a much needed

[5] It is in this fashion that some academic administrators choose to interpret the "efficiency"/ "national interest" model of education being virtually imposed on Universities by what we might call the "Dawkinsese" view. Rather than resist this view, some appear only too willing to work within its guide-lines. The irony is that, at another level of decision-making, in the ARC committees in Canberra, some most exciting projects relating to the composition and interpretation of medieval manuscript texts (both literary and musical) have won generous support over the last two or three years. Ultimately one must argue that any serious international scholarship is in the "national interest;" and yet we must be constantly on guard against the spectres of xenophobic totalitarianisms which may all too often subtend appeals to "national interest."

area of research which would require more patient analysis and documented support than I am able to provide. Nevertheless, I wish to outline further the nature and some possible sources of the prejudices alluded to. From a confrontation of the issues which such prejudices posit for modern academics would arise the need to examine many of the hidden assumptions which have underpinned and at times skewed some twentieth-century work in the Humanities.

The "Middle Ages" (*medium ævum*)[6] is a term created by the Renaissance humanists to bracket out an earlier period of textual and interpretative activity relative to the Latin and Greek classics. An initial movement of this new "philology" (also a Renaissance term) led to the bracketing out of much else as well, accompanied as it was by Reformation attitudes to religious organisational life and to biblical textual commentary in the immediately preceding centuries. This renaissance philology included a belief in the ability to reconstruct authentic and linguistically purified original texts which could then be analysed and commented on as historical witnesses to the grandeur of the human spirit, a grandeur which could be recaptured through their recreation and through practices of "imitation." The humanists were aided in their desire to establish and disseminate authoritative texts (both of their own making and the "rediscovered" classics) by the ability of the printing press to reproduce multiple copies of the "same" text without variation. The practices of the textual professionals who preceded them (the scribes and commentators) seemed to have failed, in their minds, to preserve the linguistic purity of the classics. The historicity and the human grandeur of the classics had been obscured by what the humanists considered as anachronistic and obscurantist commentary. The work of their immediate predecessors needed to be suppressed if they, the humanist scholars,were to be able to return to an original purity; it is as if they thought to cancel out a certain kind of pubescent experience in order to return to the womb and be born again.

Coinciding with this apparent rebirth of classical texts and the creation of "philology" was the Reformation. The aim of the various reforming movements was of course to "protest" and to "reform." This

[6] On the dating and various meanings and values designated by these terms, see N. Edelman, "The Early Uses of *Medium Ævum, Moyen Age, Middle Ages,*" in *Romanic Review* 29 (1938) : 3-25 and "Other Early Uses of *moyen âge* and *moyen temps*," in *Romanic Review* 30 (1939) : 327-30. The Latin expression *media tempestas* dates from 1469. For an account of some twentieth-century literary and journalistic uses of the word "medieval" in many contemporary European languages, see Fred C. Robinson, "Medieval, the Middle Ages," in *Speculum* 59 (1984) : 745-56; the paper is in many ways amusing, yet it points to matters of serious import.

involved firstly an idea of return to an original evangelical purity based on authentic texts which would provide a firm foundation for the reorganisation of ecclesiastical structures and both corporate and individual religious life; secondly this reformation involved a rejection of the immediately preceding centuries of church organisation, biblical exegesis and certain forms of spiritual formation. The reformers needed to carry out this suppression in order to assert the success of their own return to an original purity. One thing common then to the Humanist Renaissance and the Reforming movements of Europe in the sixteenth century was the need to criticise and suppress a preceding era in order to be able to reach surely and safely an original purity, which in both cases focused (but for different reasons) on the recreation of a period centred on the first century A. D. It was thus that the *medium ævum* could be defined and passed over.

Yet the very nature of Renaissance philology meant that sooner or later some recuperation of medieval texts would be undertaken. In fact the recuperation began almost immediately in the collections of individual humanist bibliophiles of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. By the eighteenth century the process of recuperation had become more systematic. I think for example of the undertakings of scholars such as Du Cange in the late seventeenth century with his *Glossarium mediæ et infimæ latinitas* (itself a "loaded" title) and the work initiated some 50 years later by the Benedictines of St Maur with the initial publications of their *Histoire littéraire de la France* in 1733. It is interesting to reflect on the words we still use to classify this incipient recuperation of the medieval; words such as "bookish" and "antiquarian" still abound in our descriptions of those activities, terms used initially, I believe, to define them in the European age of reason and so-called enlightenment.

Combined with the late eighteenth-century Rousseauesque notions of the primitive and noble savage and some Romantic notions of the wondrous, odd and marvellous, the "medieval" saw a revival of interest in early nineteenth-century Europe. This led subsequently into quite thorough and methodical attempts at recuperation in the historical positivist mode. Philology in the more narrow sense of the establishment, history and critique of texts and of the language of texts was extended now from classical texts to include the medieval vernaculars. Through the comparison of language forms, the various branches of Comparative and Historical Philology (primarily those of Phonetics and Grammar) made their appearance. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such disciplines were introduced into University academic programmes coinciding with and as part of the establishment of Chairs in "modern" languages and literatures. It is in this mode and context that studies of

"early" and therefore "old" vernacular languages and literatures, seen in the context of "historical beginnings," have been pursued and justified until at least the 1960s and often beyond. This policy has led to some form of recuperation of the "medieval" in general. But the power of the Renaissance and Reformation narrative of history is such that any full recuperation still remains problematic. Prejudices towards the "medieval" have taken different forms in different national traditions and they frequently reveal themselves most clearly in attitudes towards religious issues; culturally inherited attitudes deriving from the conflicts of the Reformation are still far more emotionally explosive than those which may be traced to Renaissance humanist lines of thinking.

The consequences of these religious misconceptions of the Catholic Middle ages are profound. It is on these questions of religious prejudice that I now wish to reflect briefly, because their influence on the organisation and selection of academic curricula is far-reaching. The derision of things "medieval" stems from the profoundly secular nature of intellectual academic life particularly, in France at least, since the Revolution and the earlier anti-Catholic campaigning of people such as Voltaire, for the intellectual life of the Middle Ages is seen as primarily "Catholic".[7] Of course an intellectual and spiritual Catholic tradition has continued with some of its roots reaching back in an unbroken line to medieval thinkers; but Catholic tradition has suffered in Europe (now almost to the point of total impoverishment); on the one hand it has been basically contemned or ignored by Academia and on the other it has suffered from being on the defensive against an increasingly powerful secular academic thrust and from a progressive "protestantisation" of its traditions; it has been marginalised by the Academy and cut off from the vigour of its own medieval roots; thus isolated, it has in many respects tended to ossify; late nineteenth-century neo-scholasticism or neo-thomism has scarcely been a true "imitation" of the vigorous spirit of Thomas Aquinas. In English academic life too anti-Catholic prejudices abound; they stem clearly from the Reformation and the break of the English Church from its links with Rome and the continent. The political and intellectual upheavals in Europe in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries shifted attitudes towards the earlier medieval era in an even more radically negative direction in many cases. The period immediately preceding the French and English Renaissance of the sixteenth century was condemned by Renaissance historians as being primitive, benighted and superstitious,

[7] The European Middle Ages are "Catholic" in a way that it is not always easy for us to appreciate, since both post-Reformation and post-Counter-Reformation understandings of the word "Catholic" (seen almost automatically as Roman and "popish") really give us little understanding of the "Catholic" of the Middle Ages.

both intellectually and spiritually. The pretence that they, the Renaissance scholars, had rediscovered the real nature of the Greek and Latin classics (parallel to the Reformers' rediscovery of evangelical purity) blinded them to the fact that their restoration of classical texts was part of a process of archæological ossification which would ultimately put paid to the real life and influence of those works as they had been understood, used, adapted and consumed in the Middle Ages. So powerful was the propaganda of Renaissance historians that their narrative of the Middle Ages has survived to this day, relayed by historians like Gibbon, Burckhardt and Michelet.[8] Nowhere is this more strikingly portrayed than in some of the older academic programmes of departments of Philosophy, when supposedly historical surveys of Western Philosophy were still in vogue. Frequently, if not normally, one jumped quite easily from Aristotle to Descartes and Hume, as if nothing significant had happened in between. The Renaissance condemnation of the Middle Ages had been picked up by the Reformers who, in identifying the whole earlier period as "Catholic," thereby justified its dismissal. The same was true for the "new" European philosophers from Descartes on. The medieval period had been defined as ignorant in relation to the classics (a proposition which now scarcely bears close investigation) and ignorant as far as any real intellectual or spiritual life was concerned. Modern Europe has suffered much, it seems to me, by deliberately turning its back on a thousand years of its own history or by (mis)re-presenting that history. The results of this are that those of us who in one way or another are engaged in redressing that imbalance as scholars and seekers, whether European or not, concerned with viable intellectual and spiritual traditions in a contemporary world, are still very much aware in our own lives and choices of blinds still drawn by colleagues over the medieval period.

It is inevitable that the formation of academic life in Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries should have been heavily influenced by British and more generally European attitudes. Apart from the notions of historical progress and evolutionary development and a set of deeply entrenched religious prejudices which have affected the way in which medieval studies have been viewed and located within academic programmes, there has also come into play a set of "imperial" and "colonial" attitudes. I do not think it accidental that the typical opponent

[8] Consider, for example, the following statement of the literary historian Ferdinand Brunetière : "Le modèle qui manquait au moyen âge, la Renaissance le retrouva... C'est pourquoi, comme la prose française ne date que de Rabelais, de Calvin et de Montaigne, ainsi la poésie française ne date que de Ronsard et de la Pléiade," from Brunetière's *Etudes critiques sur l'histoire de la littérature française* (Paris, 1888) : 47, quoted by R. Howard Bloch, "New Philology and Old French," in *Speculum* 65 (1990) : 38-58; 43-4.

of medieval studies in Australia would be British, or British-oriented, specialising in nineteenth or early twentieth-century studies, infected by imperial attitudes towards the supremacy of things English, holding beliefs in progress and evolutionary development; such an opponent would be, often unwittingly, a supporter of colonial attitudes and the civilising influence of the British (or Europeans, at least) in areas of thought not directly concerned with former colonies as such. In such a colonial mindset, the unfamiliar and unprofitable are there to be colonised, that is, to be converted and civilised, a process accomplished simply by defining the unfamiliar as "primitive," "barbaric," "naïve," "benighted," and then proceeding to belittle the accomplishments of the "primitives" as unworthy and beneath serious consideration; the narrow parochial worldview and value systems of the coloniser could then be imposed by force in the name of "aid," "conversion" and "enlightenment," a process which would allow the exploitation of the other to serve one's own ends. These are the attitudes one can still hear in academic conversations and constantly read in both popular and serious articles and studies relative to the Middle Ages; if not simply ignored, the Middle Ages have been through a process of romanticisation, colonisation and exploitation which parallels the pattern of those processes in European attitudes and policies towards Africa or the Far East from the eighteenth century onwards. The result is that the Medieval World is still in need of its liberators and freedom-fighters as much as any former European colony; and it is finding them; but the liberators are finding themselves attacked and ridiculed, sniped at not only by modernists but also by a former generation of medievalists who are perfectly comfortable with the reigning attitudes of scholarship which allow them to dominate and colonise the territory of their occupation, and who appear quite unwilling to recognise in that territory a culture, different but coherent, subtle, meaningful in its own terms and worthy of respect and understanding.

As a somewhat brief aside on the effect of certain British attitudes dictating much of what has gone on in British and English-speaking Universities since the turn of the century, we might consider the place of Anglo-Norman studies in English Departments at Universities. I take it as accepted that Modern English is a unique hybrid of Germanic and Romance sources. This is acknowledged in any History of the English language; why then have English departments given pride of place to the Anglo-Saxon and Nordic origins of English at the expense of the Romance origins in the course offerings in their departments? I think this choice again points to the power of nineteenth-century British prejudices in the establishment of academic programmes and curricula, prejudices which still partly hold sway in many unwitting and unconscious ways in

conservative Australian academia. The preference for Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse (where even they still happen to be retained) is to be explained in terms of an earlier British academic Germanophilia compounded by a certain Francophobia. Given three solid centuries of literary production of considerable importance from 1066 to the mid-fourteenth century in Anglo-Norman, the dearth of studies in that language by scholars of English requires some sort of explanation. The writings of that most studied of all English medieval authors, Chaucer, give witness to the linguistic influence not only of continental French works but also of the works of his Anglo-Norman forbears.[9]

What then of the possible contemporaneity of Medieval Studies and what place do or may they occupy in University programmes? Certainly the "medieval" still does have contemporary currency; in Europe at least the physical signs of the medieval world as part of any contemporary scene abound; and it is a truism to acknowledge the medieval roots of so much of our legal, political and educational heritage, roots which are bedded in fundamental reforms in those areas of social organisation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in particular. So there are modes of viewing the medieval world available through the study of texts and institutions which concentrate on "sameness" and on a certain identity with contemporary problems. If this mode of examination is not larded heavily with the notion of "difference," "otherness," "alterity" (to use a Jaussian term),[10] then that concentration on the "sameness" of the Middle Ages has its dangers, for it ends up reducing the Middle Ages once again to the level of "primitive beginnings".[11] The secrets which that culture has yet to reveal when treated in its own right, as both "same" and "different," and when treated as if it has something to say, will revolu-

[9] For the notion of the status and independence of Anglo-Norman linguistic norms as important in their own right, as deserving to be considered as something more than simply a variant dialect of continental French, a notion which is implicit in the above statement, I am indebted to conversations with and the writings of my colleague, Bernadette Masters, of the University of Sydney. For earlier but still valid comments concerning the uniqueness of this "peripheral dialect of French," see S. Harrison Thomson, "The Criteria of Latin Paleography in the Study of Anglo-Norman," in *Romanic Review* 29 (1938) : 112-9.

[10] See the important essay on this topic by H. R. Jauss in his volume entitled *Alterität und Modernität der Mittelalterlichen Literatur* (München : Wilhelm Fink, 1977) : 9-47.

[11] To illustrate this danger I take a statement by Umberto Eco, from the English translation of one of his essays, "Dreaming of the Middle Ages," published in the volume entitled *Faith in Fakes*, trans. W. Weaver (London : Secker & Warburg, 1986) : "Thus looking at the Middle Ages means looking at our infancy, in the same way that a doctor, to understand our present state of health, asks us about our childhood, or in the same way that the psychoanalyst, to understand our present neuroses, makes a careful investigation of the primal scene" (65).

tionise our understanding of that world and consequently shift our understanding of our own; such a process I believe to be a primary justification for undertaking the study of any language and culture.

One mode of retrieval of the medieval, as a starting point, is via courses in comparative medieval literature and interdisciplinary courses of various kinds. A range of such courses, organised in cooperation with colleagues from the English and History departments, has been made available here to Arts students since the late 1970s. At both the Postgraduate[12] and Undergraduate levels, courses in Comparative Medieval Literature have been developed. The interdisciplinary course *Introduction to Aspects of Medieval Life and Literature*, planned and taught jointly with my colleague Elizabeth Moores of the English department, has operated in two forms since its introduction in 1984.[13] Another interdisciplinary course bearing on "literary" and "historical"[14] texts was planned and taught jointly with my colleague John Moorhead of the History department during the early 1980s : *Individual and Society in Twelfth-century France.*[15]

But what of the place of Philology, History of the Language and medieval French literary texts in the original? The focus for me in my teaching has become more and more that of the "text" as weaving a world

[12] With the increasing decline in the Government funding of tenurable academic positions in the early 1980s, the Department of French chose to withdraw from participation in the Master of Literary Studies, a course-work Masters degree. The original Masters course in Comparative Medieval Literature was conducted in cooperation with colleagues from the Departments of Classics and Ancient History, English, German and Russian. Largely motivated by the excitement generated in some of those courses, two former students have subsequently completed Doctorates in Medieval French.

[13] It has always been a year course, organised as a series of informal lectures alternating with seminar discussion of particular texts. In its first form, texts and topics were selected from the time of Boethius and Ostrogothic Italy through until Chaucer and fourteenth-century England. The course included Latin texts in translation as well as texts in Anglo-Saxon, Old French and Middle English; a subsequent form of the course concentrated more exclusively on Epic and Romance; the earlier Latin material (*The Consolation of Philosophy* and some Carolingian Saints' Lives) gave way to Icelandic material and contemporary film.

[14] I place these terms in inverted commas to indicate categorisations of texts according to modern preconceptions, which are not necessarily those of the production of texts in the period in question.

[15] The following course description from our course notes in 1985 gives some taste of the teaching approach which John Moorhead and I adopted in this course : "The purpose of this interdisciplinary subject is to consider how people in the twelfth century perceived their relationships with others : as rulers and subjects, believers, friends and enemies, and lovers and spouses. It will be based on the reading of contemporary documents, giving equal weight to sources usually associated with historical and literary studies. The course should appeal to students interested in History, French and Medieval Studies."

that is worth investigation not only in its own right but also in terms of what we choose to bring to it, to make of it. The study of the language, phonetics,[16] morphology and so on is no longer subordinated to the study of History of the French Language but serves the aim of an exact, intelligent reading of the text, at the literal level first and at a subsequent stage that of readings at other levels.

Experience of teaching how to read these medieval texts over the past twenty years, even to foreign language students, has increasingly revealed gaps in the ability of students to be able to come to terms with simple grammatical analyses of written texts. This, of course, is partly due to the decline in the study of Latin and to the promotion of audio-visual/lingual expressive modes in modern language teaching. But a thorough grasp of the "letter"[17] (*littera* — to use the terminology of the medieval writers themselves), i. e., morphology, syntax, lexis (including etymologies) is the *sine qua non* of being able to enter into the "sense" (*sensus*) and the "symbolic meanings" (*sententiae*) of these texts.[18] Incidentally then, the course in Old French becomes for most students their only introduction to aspects of formal grammar.

[16] The two courses I have subsequently taught bearing on Historical Phonetics were as Special Subjects at the graduate level. In each case Historical Phonetics has been subordinated to Dialectology as we have answered questions relative to the regional location of four or five manuscript copies of the "same" text, basing our analysis on the study of graphies and rhymes. An understanding of the Vulgar Latin sound system and of historical phonetics becomes an essential tool in answering such specific questions. It is at this level that students can appreciate the value and the rigour of such study. For pertinent comments on the issue see Jean Rychner, "Remarques sur les introductions phonétiques aux éditions de textes en ancien français," in *Studia Neophilologica* 34 (1962): 6-21.

[17] While the current tendency of the so-called "New Humanities" to abandon the term "Literature" as it has come to be understood in the Academy over the past century or so now appears understandable and even laudable, the tendency to replace it with terms such as "Culture," "Cultural Studies" seems to me fraught with serious dangers : firstly, because the replacement terminology obfuscates the primary sense of the study of the *littera* which must remain the *sine qua non* of textual interpretative activity; and secondly, because the chosen terminology runs the risk of subtly subverting the precise and exacting study of the letter of texts into potted notions deriving from the contemporary "sciences" of Sociology and Anthropology. In saying this, I remain aware of the need for a possible redefinition of the term *littera* in the light of wider understandings of the notion of "text."

[18] So Hugh of St Victor in his *Didascalicon,* III, 9 : "Expositio tria continet : litteram, sensum, sententiam. *Littera* est congrua ordinatio dictionum quam etiam constructionem vocamus. *Sensus* est facilis quaedam et aperta significatio quam littera prima fronte praefert. *Sententia* est profundior intelligentia quae nisi expositione vel interpretatione non invenitur. In his ordo est, ut primum littera, deinde sensus, deinde sententia inquiratur : quo facto, perfecta est expositio." *Patrologia latina,* 176, 771-2. Translation : "Exposition includes three things : the letter, the sense, and the inner meaning. The letter is the fit arrangement of words, which we also call construction; the sense is a certain ready

The aims and objectives of the programme I have developed more particularly over the last ten years are nothing less than a radical overhaul and a progressive rewriting of an introductory training programme designed for contemporary Australian students to enable them to read the letter and to enter into a personal understanding of meanings to be discovered in medieval French texts. The three broad areas of investigation that I decided to build into this introductory course were i) a History of the French Language, Latin to Middle French, ii) a synchronic and systematic study of the literary French language of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Morphology and Syntax), to be motivated and exemplified by iii) a minutely detailed study of a dozen or more extracts of some 30 or 40 lines of text each week, selected from two or three literary texts of the period. An essential part of the programme is the process adopted whereby students are made responsible for their own reading, commentary and interpretation from the very beginning of the course; another essential feature is one of incremental repetition in the regular out-of-class exercises proposed, based on five extracts on which the students are required to work in their own time at the rate of one every two weeks, commencing from week 3 of the course.[19] The requirement of these exercises is to produce a literal but readable translation of some 15 lines of Old French (literal enough to reveal an understanding of the syntax of the passage to be translated), accompanied by answers to a set of specific grammatical questions, the aim of which is to empower the students to appreciate the construction of the "letter." These questions constantly focus on selected points of grammar (including orthography and lexis) which experience has shown to provide the greatest obstacles to the fluent reading of the texts.[20] The primary aim of the initial reading

and obvious meaning which the letter presents on the surface; the inner meaning is the deeper understanding which can be found only through interpretation and commentary. Among these, the order of inquiry is first the letter, then the sense, and finally the inner meaning. And when this is done, the exposition is complete." *The 'Didascalicon' of Hugh of St. Victor*, trans. J. Taylor (New York : Columbia UP, 1961) : 92.

[19] In early 1990 I was on an exchange programme to the University of Tennessee (Knoxville); my colleague from Tennessee, Professor Paul Barrette, taught the Old French course here, working from my materials. The experience so shifted his perceptions of how Old French might be taught, that it formed a substantial part of a 1991 conference paper which he gave at the 26th International Congress on Medieval Studies, held as it is every year at Kalamazoo, Western Michigan : "Stepping Into Someone Else's Shoes : The Benefits of Imposed Changes in the Teaching of Old French." Paul's view was that : "The student is forced to focus on many precise aspects of the language and to write coherent answers to very specific questions," and "What strikes us most in this [method] is the tremendous amount of active work asked of the students."

[20] These include i) the case system of nouns; ii) the frequent "omission" of personal pronouns whereby the verb form includes in itself a critical mark of the pronominal

course is to bring students with a basic knowledge of Modern French to an adequate level of competence in reading Old French texts within the space of 14 weeks. At the end of the course students are expected to have reached a degree of competence in the reading and analysis of an Old French text such as to enable them to read one or two romances, for example, within a semester, to discuss the text and its themes intelligently, and to be able to support the analysis and argument by the citation and very precise analysis of segments of the original text. I prefer to work in this mode, rather than in the mode of many North American Universities where the Medieval period is studied entirely in French and based on Modern French translations or adaptations; such a procedure carried out in that context serves only to confirm the policies of cultural annexation and colonisation which I alluded to earlier.

Reflection on reading texts in the French of the medieval period, that is of a pre-print culture, brings us back to the themes of "sameness" and "difference," notions which have ramifications for class-room practice. Medieval manuscript texts have a status rather different from that of their modern counterparts which are products of a print culture. Students need to be sensitised to that difference, to the principle of "variance" operative in the production of manuscript texts. For the specialist, this experience may be achieved by the interconnected disciplines of codicology, palaeography and dialectology. The medieval text is never transparent, as many modern critical editions might lead us to believe, but opaque, open to variation and multiple interpretation. It is important, even in the early stages of teaching how to read medieval texts, to make students aware of this difference. Students' puzzlement over such differences will often spring from questions relating to spelling differences within the one text; this can be used as a starting point for the introduction of wider notions of "variance".[21]

subject; iii) the strong and weak forms of the personal pronouns and their position in the syntactic group; iv) the forms and use of demonstrative pronouns and adjectives, especially the anaphoric use of *cil* in narrative; v) the various uses of the subjunctive, especially its use in the hypothetical system; vi) the use of narrative adverbs as markers in the successive moments of narration, such as *atant, lors, si,* and so on; vii) a strict observation of the alternation of tenses in narration; viii) negation and the coordinating *ne*; ix) sensitisation to the possible uses of the imperfect, the *passé simple* and the *passé antérieur* in description.

[21] I think of recommendations along these lines made a number of years ago by J.-Ch. Payen and B. Cerquiglini respectively in a special issue of *Perspectives médiévales* 1 (1975) : "il faut que l'étudiant soit très vite familiarisé avec des notions comme celle de la 'variance' et sache que le texte qu'il a sous les yeux est établi à partir d'une traditition manuscrite assez incertaine" (7); and "Travailler sur le seul texte édité, imprimé est donc mutilant, et l'enseignement de la langue (littéraire) médiévale gagnerait à s'orienter vers l'utilisation de reproductions [...] de manuscrits..." (14). The theme has been taken up

At the same time it is important to arouse students' interest not only in the language and in textual problems as such, but also in narrative, in questions of overall "senefiance;" it is important to show how questions of literal analysis and variation play a role in understanding the narrative sequences and overall levels of interpretation. It is for this reason that it seems to me preferable, after an initial training course in reading, to move on in subsequent courses to read whole texts, and not to continue the practice of anthologised extracts. The method I have opted for in the subsequent Medieval Studies course is to provide students with transcriptions of at least one manuscript of a text as the basis for a semester course of study. The text is presented in a form in which abbreviations are resolved; at the moment I am still opting to use modern word divisions and the use of apostrophes in cases such as *l'iver* or *s'amie*. Apart from those interventions, the texts chosen are to be presented without the aid of modern punctuation. The text we are working on at the moment is the *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes transcribed according to the Guiot copy, Paris, Bibl. nat., fr. 794.[22] Of course there are dangers and difficulties in this mode of presentation. Given students' notions of modern texts as transparent, unique, fixed and authoritative, the danger is to read the

even more vigorously by B. Cerquiglini in his recent *Eloge de la variante : Histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1989). The development of my own attitudes towards such matters owes a great deal, in more recent years, to discussions with Bernadette Masters; for a superbly distanced and yet passionate discussion relating to the principle of respecting "variance" in the editing of manuscripted texts, see her "Distribution, Destruction and Dislocation of Authority in Medieval Literature and Its Modern Derivatives," in *Romanic Review* 82 (1991) : 270-85 and her most recent publication, *Esthétique et Manuscripture : le "Moulin à paroles" au moyen âge* (Heidelberg : Carl Winter, 1992).

[22] J. Keith Atkinson, ed., *The 'Perceval' of Chrétien de Troyes according to Guiot* (Brisbane : Boombana Publications, 1991). Apart from being a largely diplomatic edition of the verbal text as presented by Guiot, my edition re-presents the text in its manuscript format of three columns per page, each of 44 lines of verse; the positioning of capitals respects that of the original manuscript. This presentation is intended to provide an exact basis for medieval language studies and to allow interpretative developments which would recognise in a very precise way the concepts of "measure, number and weight" in the very composition of manuscript texts. The major contribution to this kind of interpretation to date is the work being carried on by my colleague, Joan Helm. Joan's thesis related to such principles of organisation and interpretation employed by Guiot : *The Union of Heaven and Earth : Structure in MS Paris, Bibl. nat., fr. 794, Erec et Enide*, diss., University of Queensland, 1988. Other publications of Joan Helm relative to these matters are : "The celestial circle : fées, philosophy and numerical circularity in medieval Arthurian romances," in *Arthurian Interpretations* 3/1 (1988) : 25-36; "Examples of the use of the Golden Ratio in medieval Arthurian literature," in *Quondam et Futurus* 9/2 (1989) : 7-14; "Nature's Marvel : Enide as Earth Measure in an Early Arthurian Manuscript," in *Quondam et Futurus : A Journal of Arthurian Interpretations* 1/3 (1991) : 1-24. See also her contribution in this volume.

transcribed manuscript in precisely the same fashion, thus giving a status to the text presented which is not medieval but modern.

There are steps which can be taken which do partially overcome this danger. The first step is to spend some time early in the semester working, however briefly, on photographic reproductions of a folio or two of the manuscript in question, accompanied by photographic reproductions of at least two other manuscripts of the "same" text. An alternative mode of operation would be to design a whole course around three or four manuscript transcriptions of the "same" shorter text. The second step, advisable in my experience for students at second and third year level, is to make available to them for consultation a modern critical edition of the text being studied. In my own current circumstances, the choice of Lecoy's edition of Chrétien's *Perceval*[23] to accompany the transcription of the manuscript is evident, since that edition respects the Guiot copy quite faithfully. In a sense the modern edition can play the role of another medieval copy of the text, but this time accompanied by the help of familiar interpretative punctuation. The experience in using my largely diplomatic version is that the absence of punctuation forces some form of reading aloud;[24] it makes the reader far more sensitive to the power of syntactic groups and particular lexical items as narrative markers.[25] The pauses and recapitulations that such a reading requires direct the reader's attention inevitably in the first place to the "letter" of the text and subsequently give rise to multiple interpretations;[26] some of these may have to be abandoned as reaching out too far beyond the support of the text itself, but many may be retained in a process which I hold to be perfectly in consonance with medieval habits. The multiple layers of

[23] F. Lecoy, *Le conte du graal (Perceval)*, 2 vols, CFMA (Paris : Champion, 1973).

[24] It is certain that medieval readers read hearing aloud; see, for example, Paul Zumthor, "The Text and the Voice," in *New Literary History* 16/1 (1984) : 67-92, esp. 68 : "We may be assured that even reading by oneself would normally include an articulation of the sounds being decoded" and 88 where Zumthor speaks of the "redundant features of the 'phatic' functions [of the discourse]." The questions touched on here should be seen in the light of the current debate on the "orality" of medieval literature.

[25] My own sensitisation to the possible function of lexical items and syntactic patterns as, in a sense, "punctuating" narrative chunks or sequences arose from seminar work with Jean Rychner in the late 1960s, work which found its more mature expression in his *L'articulation des phrases narratives dans la 'Mort Artu'* (Genève : Droz, 1970).

[26] R. Howard Bloch puts it thus in his "New Philology and Old French," in *Speculum* 65 (1990) : 38-58 : "the more we try to read [the Old French text] literally – or at the level of the letter – the more we become convinced of its very impenetrability, of the impossibility of reducing its pregnant plays of the letter to univocal meaning, or, for that matter, of the impossibility of ever exhausting the semantic resonances of certain key syllables and words" (47).

significance so retrieved are not dissimilar in kind to the layers of meaning derived from the methods and processes adopted by medieval exegesis.[27] A third step, again a practical one given the limited time of one semester, is to encourage students to make use of modern translations (when such translations exist)[28] of the text in question for two reasons : one is for students to obtain some notion of the "story" as a whole at an early stage of their reading, a reading which can act as a strong predictive factor in motivating their return to an examination of the original text; the second is to allow an easier identification of themes and motifs (whether of a literary, historical, psychological or sociological kind, depending on individual interests) which may then be located and worked on in the original via precise analysis of the "letter."

It is at this point that some of the apparent barriers between "modern" and "medieval" may partially appear to break down, for the methodologies of modern critical analysis may be productively used in relation to medieval texts. Students who have been trained in semiotics, text and discourse analysis and general problems of hermeneutics by colleagues in the department inevitably bring their own special insights and

[27] Amongst the many studies relative to levels of interpretation in the medieval reading and interpretation of texts, I cite that of de Bruyne, *Etudes d'esthétique médiévale*, 3 vols, (Bruges, 1946; New York : Slatkine Reprints, 1975), esp. vol. 2, Chap. 7, "La théorie de l'allégorisme," where de Bruyne examines the modes and effects of both biblical and non-biblical exegetical practices. In the practice of the best medieval commentators, the method is not to be used indiscriminately; thus Hugh of St Victor in his *Didascalicon*, V, 2 writes : "It is necessary, therefore, so to handle the Sacred Scripture that we do not try to find history *(historiam)* everywhere, nor allegory *(allegoriam)* everywhere, nor tropology *(tropologiam)* everywhere but rather that we assign individual things fittingly in their own places, as reason demands. Often, however, in one and the same literal context *(littera)*, all may be found together, as when a truth of history both hints at some mystical meaning by way of allegory, and equally shows by way of tropology how we ought to behave" (trans. J. Taylor, *op. cit.*, 121).

[28] Translations are far from being essential to the process; the detailed synopses of the "story" provided in the introductions of editions such as those of the Classiques Français du Moyen Age can be used for much the same purpose. In the case of some modern English (or American) translations, now beginning to flood the "market," one must deplore the occasionally cavalier disregard for medieval manuscript readings and the sometimes quite subjective establishment of the modern edition used as the basis of the accompanying translation. Norris J. Lacy gives a quite useful bibliographic survey of French Arthurian texts in translation in "Medieval French Arthurian Literature in English," in *Quondam et Futurus : A Journal of Arthurian Interpretations* 1/3 (1991) : 55-74; I would, perhaps, be a little more hesitant than he in judging the majority to be "accurate and scholarly." Rather than go down the "translation" road so vigorously, I think it preferable to spend time and energy developing, for example, appropriate "Teach Yourself to Read Old French" booklets. Such publications will, I believe, have a marketability both within and outside University curricula and will better serve the cause of the medieval texts to be read.

questions to course discussions and enrich the learning experience. Here are signs of leverage which may help to break down the isolation and marginalisation experienced by most medievalists.

And yet the power of the Renaissance narrative of history is such that it is still difficult for the medievalist to resist some sense of isolation and marginalisation. Medievalists still often feel and act defensively. One form of defense has been isolationist and protective. Ultimately I believe the establishment of various insititutes of medieval studies will be seen as part of that isolationist tendency. That is not to say that such a regrouping and concentration of forces has not been necessary and fruitful. It has been and it still is; the best interdisciplinary experiences of such institutes may well serve as a model for other regroupings of interests in the humanities.

As an academic working in Australia over the last 30 years I have experienced a sense of loss at the lack of such a medieval institute in this country. My efforts to establish interdisciplinary medieval courses here have been motivated by a desire to overcome my own sense of loss. Yet while the founding of such institutes elsewhere and the introduction of interdisciplinary courses have allowed regroupings of like-minded people and staved off a sense of isolation from each other, they have still not provided the means for the full acceptance of the "medieval" as a normal part of an academic curriculum. Such regroupings have still all too often allowed the "medieval" to be ignored completely by others or treated as marginal.

Part of the problem, especially in English-speaking academic circles, arises from the use of the term "Philology" in its restricted meaning of "the academic discipline of studying or 'scientifically' elucidating the basic, literal meaning of verbal documents",[29] a usage which is seen as somehow separate from the activities covered by the term Literary Criticism. So a more recent movement on the part of medievalists to legitimate their field of study and to integrate both their discipline and themselves into the academic "main-stream" has been to learn, further and apply the theories and methodologies of the contemporary Human Sciences; publications relative to medieval texts and institutions based on the tenets and insights of psycho-analysis, structuralism, deconstruction, semiotics, discourse analysis, narratology and so on have appeared in increasing numbers over the last 30 years. However successful or not such efforts may have been, they have often sprung from an initially defensive attitude; they have become part of a movement to overcome the isolation and marginalisation experienced by medievalists; they signify an

[29] See note 2 above.

attempt to be integrated as a legitimate part of "main-stream" academic life.[30]

This, as I see it, is where we are. Whichever way we turn we are still caught in a largely Renaissance concept of historical periodisation in which there is a "classical," a "middle" and a "modern." The classicists and the modernists also work within the light of those divisions with all the consequences that that entails for all of us.[31]

I have no simple answer to the dilemmas which this analysis points to. We all learn to live with contradiction. At least becoming aware of the dilemmas and contradictions does provide some solace. One radical solution, and I would not be the first to propose it,[32] would be simply to abandon the use of the term "medieval" and the narrative which operated in its creation and which it still evokes. Easier said than done. Yet the medievalist is more likely than the modernist to be placed in a position where the contradictions have to be faced squarely. The challenge is always there, for s/he is constantly obliged to move in the teaching programme between different historical periods and to operate according to different pedagogic modes and objectives; this experience either results in a restless schizophrenia or provides a challenge to bridge apparent chasms, to integrate, to redefine what is the "same" and what is "different" in subject-matter, objectives and methodologies. The interplay of exploring these commonalities and these differences has led to rewarding shifts of perspective in my work and, I believe, in the perspectives of colleagues and students.

Gradually, attitudes of isolation, defense and marginalisation are being broken down. Yet what is needed ultimately is the shattering of a Renaissance and Reformation-based narrative of European history and the creation of a narrative powerful enough to replace it, a new narrative which will respect both what is the "same" and what is "different" in the medieval world and at the same time recognise the inherent worth and quality of the achievements of that society, achievements which may just

[30] Herein would lie a fruitful research topic; the corpus could include some 20 or 30 influential titles of works which apply modern methodologies to the analysis of medieval texts and a critical survey of the reaction of medievalists to those publications via the reviews of them in scholarly journals.

[31] The place of medieval Latin and Greek language and literature courses (or rather the lack of a place) is one perfectly clear sign of the unfortunate consequences of the division. Such studies are neither part of "classical" or "modern" concerns, and they have lacked justification as "historical beginnings" of living vernacular languages.

[32] I express here my gratitude to my colleague Bernadette Masters for some helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper; amongst them her reminder of the important study of Régine Pernoud, *Pour en finir avec le moyen âge* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1979).

be worth exploring and considering as offering viable alternatives in our own lives. What we need then are new bottles from which to decant and savour a good Old French wine.

Keith Atkinson